

Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR) therapy is an extensively researched, effective psychotherapy method proven to help people recover from trauma and other distressing life experiences, including PTSD, anxiety, depression, and panic disorders.

Therapists use EMDR for:

- Anxiety, panic attacks, and phobias
- Chronic illness and medical issues
- Depression and bipolar disorders
- Eating disorders
- Grief and loss
- Pain
- Psychosis
- PTSD/CPTSD
- Sexual assault
- Sleep disturbance
- Substance abuse and addiction
- Violence and abuse

How is EMDR Different from Other Therapies?

EMDR therapy can be done in-person or via virtual platforms and must be done with a properly trained and licensed mental health clinician.

EMDR therapy does not require talking in detail about the distressing issue or homework between sessions. EMDR supports the brain to resume its natural healing process. EMDR therapy is designed to process traumatic memories in the brain, so the person is informed by these memories but not controlled by them. Part of the therapy includes alternating eye movements, sounds, or taps. For many clients, EMDR therapy can be completed in fewer sessions than other psychotherapies.

How can EMDR Therapy Help with the Healing Process?

Our brains have a natural way to recover from traumatic memories and events. This process involves communication between the amygdala (the alarm signal for stressful events), the hippocampus (which assists with learning, including memories about safety and danger), and the prefrontal cortex (which analyzes and controls behavior and emotion). While many times traumatic experiences can be managed and resolved spontaneously, others may not be processed without help.

Stress responses are our natural fight, flight, or freeze instincts. When distress from a disturbing event remains, the upsetting images, thoughts, and emotions may create feelings of overwhelm, of being back in that moment, or of being “frozen in time.” EMDR therapy helps the brain process these memories and allows normal healing to resume. The experience is still remembered, but the fight, flight, or freeze response from the original event is resolved.

“Something changed the first time I experienced EMDR and if I could put one word on it... it would be HOPE.”

Experiencing EMDR Therapy

After the client and therapist discuss the client’s history, develop a treatment plan, prepare for trauma treatment, and agree that EMDR reprocessing is a good fit, the client will be asked to focus on a specific event. Attention will be given to a negative image, belief, feelings, and body sensations related to this event. While the client focuses on the upsetting event, the therapist will begin sets of side-to-side eye movements, sounds, or taps. The client will be guided to notice what comes after each set. There might be changes in insights, images, feelings, body sensations, and/or beliefs regarding the event. The client has full control to stop reprocessing at any point if needed. The sets of eye movements, sounds, or taps are repeated until the event becomes less disturbing. Then, the client will focus their attention on a positive belief that would indicate the issue was resolved. After, the client will process any disturbance still left in their body related to this event. Before the end of the session, the therapist supports the client to feel grounded and close the session. At the beginning of the next session, the client and therapist review the work done in the past session and continue reprocessing events as needed.

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